BOOK REVIEWS

ALLGEMEINE STILISTIK. By Herbert Seidler. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953. 366 p.

This book, which grew out of a *Habilitationsschrift*, is an ambitious attempt at a codification of German research (by authors such as Winkler, Seidler's teacher, Ammann, Weisgerber, Porzig, Pongs, etc.) in that kind of stylistics which is based on Charles Bally's differentiation between the intellectual and the emotional as expressed by language—the emotional being declared the domain proper to stylistics. Style, according to Seidler's definition, is the emotional quality inherent or latent in *any* given linguistic utterance and in *all* its elements (phonetic, semantic, syntactic), not merely an author's deviations from the usual conventions of a language, although these deviations may be used to demonstrate the latency of stylistic values in the language.

There exists then a definable stylistic value of the noun or the verb, of the subjunctive or the indicative, of vowels and consonants, onomatopoeias, etc.—and it is these "generic" stylistic components that are pointed out in this treatise on "general" stylistics. Although most of the examples are drawn from German poets or prose writers, the stylistic values discussed are considered as valid for other languages also. The book is divided into four parts: an introduction to the theory of style, a chapter entitled "Language as Transformation [Gestaltung] of the Empirical World," in which vocabulary, grammatical forms, phrases, and sentences are studied; a chapter on "Language as Phonation [Lautung]," treating phonetic symbolism, rhythm and melody, phonetic *Gestalt*, etc.; and a last chapter, bearing the untranslatable title, "Die höheren Wirkungsgestalten," which deals with such variegated matters as evocation of milieu by style, imagery, and symbolism, the style of a work of art, and the classification of different styles.

Since it is our author's conviction that emotional elements are latent *everywhere* in a language, what he offers us is, as it were, a treatment of "the style" inherent in grammar, a grammar of style based on the "Gemüthaftigkeit" or the "Gefühlswert" of the elements of the language. Derivatives of these two German word families are repeated *ad nauseam* throughout the book.

My first impression is that, in this radical "stylisticization" of the whole language, the concept of style has been extended far beyond what we are accustomed to mean by this term; in Seidler's usage it sometimes seems to cover even poetic invention. Seidler compares (p. 89) the following two versions of a poem by Brentano—

(a) "Die Türme blinken helle,
Und froh der grüne Wald
Von tausend bunten Stimmen
In lautem Sang erschallt."

(b) "Die Türme blinken sonnig,
Es rauscht der grüne Wald,
In wildentbrannten Weisen
Der Vogelsang erschallt"

—and states that, while the rhythmical scheme, the sound material, the syntax, and the grouping of words are the same, the "word material" and consequently the stylistic values implied in them are changed. In my opinion, when "brightly shining towers" have been replaced by "sunlike shining towers," *content*—which is not identical with style—has been changed. From the common adage that "con-

tent is inseparable from form" (a statement which may be true from the poet's point of view) we must not infer that content no longer exists or must be dissolved into style—for otherwise Genesis and the *Celestina* would only differ in "style," or, to say it bluntly, the term "style" would have become entirely meaningless. Again, on p. 296 Seidler, contrasting a description of a landscape by Stifter with one by Novalis, finds that in the first all the forms of the objects stand out with clear-cut contours, while in the second there is pictured a more blurred, changing landscape that makes the mood of the beholder change also—obviously, we again have to do with "content," not "style."

Another objection, which strikes at the very basis of Seidler's stylistics, is that, in the present stage of traditional descriptive grammar, we are far from being able to build a grammar of stylistics. We rarely know, e.g., in spite of all the existing literature on the subject, what the exact role of the definite article actually is in any of the different languages that possess this article, and are unable to compare the use of that element in the different languages (the nuance of Fr. *l'ami Fritz* is quite different from It. *l'amico Fritz*; the letterhead on stationery of my university says *The Johns Hopkins University* while continental universities call themselves *Université de Paris, Università degli studi di Firenze*). Still less are we able to define the "action on feeling" that the definite article exerts on speakers of the different languages. Sometimes Seidler himself seems afraid of his own sweeping statements: "The [stylistic] content of the (German) subjective seems to me clear: a process is seen as though through a veil" (p. 145)—one notices the smuggling in of the word "German" in a parenthesis which invalidates most glaringly the asserted generality of the statement. While one's own mother tongue can often be studied as a representative of the phenomena of "language" in general, the particular behavior of the mother tongue in a particular construction cannot safely be assumed to be representative of other languages. And what a weak, semipoetic, ultimately meaningless label: "a process seen through a veil"! The question is why the speaker of a certain language should wish to veil his statements!

In general, the formulations of our author, which depend almost exclusively on German word material and on the work of German stylisticians, may be exceedingly difficult for a foreign reader to grasp, the more so since they are often couched in that high-sounding metaphysical solemnity of pompous vagueness, out of all proportion to content, that we have come to associate with German prose writing of the last two decades—of which Heidegger's cryptic formulation, espoused by our author, "Dichtung ist worthafte Stiftung des Seins" (in more prosaic wording: poetry creates by its words a new reality), is the prototype.

To choose at random from Seidler's formulations: we have already met the phrase "die höheren Wirkungsgestalten"; a description by Trakl of servants sitting at their meal in a low-ceilinged, smoke-filled room is characterized (p. 190): "hier rollt wenn auch im kleinsten, ein Vorgang sprachlichen Weltgestaltens ab"; the archaic language of Kolbenheyer is said (p. 28) to evoke "urtümliche Lebensverbundenheit, gefühlsverhangene Beziehung zur Umwelt ..."; a poem of Hölderlin's is described by the sentence: "Ein großer Zug geht durch das Ganze, weil alle Beseelung aus einem großen Kraftstrom einer glühenden Dichterseele geboren ward." Such grandiloquence calls for Croce's witty admonishment to critics who themselves wax poetic: "Mitsingen ist verboten"—the more so since many of the contemporary poets so enthusiastically commented upon have not yet reached the stage of general recognition. Thus Jünger and Weinheber are enumerated (p. 327) along with Goethe and Rilke as "große Sprachkünstler, die um das Tiefste in der Sprache ringen." The contrived archaic style of Kolbenheyer in a passage of doubtful literary taste is discussed in a

dithyramb taking up four pages. And a dithyrambic style is sometimes applied to poetic passages whose excellence resides precisely in their simplicity; the lines of Hölderlin, "Die Dichter müssen auch / die geistigen weltlich sein," evoke the comment: *"Dichter müssen, geistig, weltlich* sind—nicht bloß Marken sondern sprachliche Weltgestaltungsschöpfungen" (*sic*!). The German words, *Dichter, müssen, geistig, weltlich,* may indeed be called "apperceptions of reality" (rather than *Weltgestaltung,* etc., etc.), but what has this fact to do with the simple statement of Hölderlin, expressed in the simplest possible manner, that poets, even the spiritual ones, should be worldly? When faced with such passages of supposedly critical prose on the meaning of words, we feel submerged in an ocean of words in which all meaning has disappeared.

In spite of these grave objections I should not like to give the impression that the author's earnestness in his metaphysical conception of language and his endeavor to grasp the emotional stylistic values of language lead to no result. On the contrary, we often find in this book new insights felicitously formulated. But what I find missing is that energetic intellectual filtering of intuitions, that self-criticism, that parsimonious use of words that would have been imperative had Seidler chosen to write for a Romance or Anglo-Saxon public. As it is, the book is hopelessly "provincial," a fact the more regrettable since the author's views are deeper than those of many students of language in less metaphysical-minded climates.

Here some critical remarks on detail may find their place:

Page 97: It is not true that suffixes were always originally separate words; the example of It. *cavallinuccio* proves precisely the contrary.

Page 98: The suffixes Germ. *-lein,* It. *-ino* are said to express a warm, cosy mood; Germ. *-chen,* It. *-etto* "eine etwas forschere, herbere [Stimmung]." The difference felt by the author between Germ. *-lein* and *-chen* is characteristic only for an Austrian, for whom *-lein* (and its variants *-l, -erl,* etc.) is the genuine, *-chen* the North German suffix. And to parallel these German suffixes with It. *-ino* and *-etto,* both equally genuine in Italian, is absolutely wrong. How could a typically Prussian epithet such as *forsch* apply to *anything* Italian?

Page 105: In order to show that the adjective generally entails a nuance of "being personally affected," Seidler offers the following example: If someone should undergo the terrible experience of having lost his eyesight, he would give form to that innermost feeling of being personally affected by exclaiming: "Blind!" But, if a blind person recovered his eyesight and his vital impulses reawoke, he would again feel adjusted to the fullness of life and exclaim: "I see!" How does Seidler know so well what, in two situations, each of which may have materialized perhaps once in a million cases, the persons concerned would say? The exact situation in each case would have to be the exact moment in which, let us say, a person awakes in the morning finding himself blind (or seeing again) and his kin (or a doctor) would have to be able to catch his very *first* spoken reaction, which would have to coincide with the first awareness by the patient of his altered state. My guess is that in both cases the form chosen would be verbal: (it seems to me) *I do not see*—(it seems to me) *I see again.* "Blind!" (or in the second case "No longer blind!") would be a second reaction in which the resulting situation would be stated, as if reflectively and as if the speaker emitted a judgment: "I belong then to the (well-known) category of the blind." It is characteristic that no adjective exists for "having recovered his eyesight"; obviously this is not a category that has found expression in *any* language.

Page 132: The passage from Stifter, "Es wurden losgegangene Bänder wieder geknüpft, im Gemüsegarten umgegraben, Fenster an Winterbeeten gelüftet . . . ," is

intended by Seidler to serve as an example for the capacity of the passive to evoke well-framed pictures in their "tranquil plenitude" (ruhende Fülle)—but I sense here also an overriding principle of orderly activity according to rule or pattern. The sentence does not effectuate "das Herausstoßen eines Erfahrungsstücks aus dem strömenden Lebenszusammenhang"; on the contrary, all those orderly activities are seen in a "Lebenszusammenhang."

Page 140: I am not sure of the rightness of the interpretation of the last two sentences of *Werther*: "Handwerker trugen ihn, kein Geistlicher hat ihn begleitet." According to Seidler, the perfect, as opposed to the preceding preterite, would be a leap toward the "firm ground of the present" from whose vantage point Goethe is looking back at the dreadful event described, which was at the point of rending his "bleeding heart." For me the perfect is a statement about the historical significance of the fact that Werther's death and funeral, the death and funeral of an eighteenth-century pantheist, occurred outside the pale of the church. There is surely involved in the perfect tense a certain coolness of intellectual appreciation of the happening from the point of view of the present, in contrast to the narrative that simply tells events; but the look into the past is to be interpreted less subjectively than Seidler interprets it.

Page 191: The stylistic contrast between two descriptions of violent events of war by Kleist and Stifter is identified by our author with Kleist's being dragged into the violence of the happenings, which are reflected in the agitated sentence structure, and Stifter's quiet, contemplative development of the scene and consequently of the sentence. But I sense also a difference between periodizing (with Kleist) and seriative juxtaposition (with Stifter). In other words, there exists with Kleist the tension between described violence and the mastering of the events by the author, while with Stifter there exists no such tension at all.

Page 249: The line, "das dumme Tier tats um des Reimes willen," is not by Arno Holz but by Christian Morgenstern.

Page 236: The remark that in Dumas Fils' *Dame aux camélias* the name of the lover, *Armando*, is spoken by Marguerite Gautier in a gamut of different moods leaves a Romance scholar baffled: *Armando* is Italian, not French. I suspect that Seidler heard from theatergoers of my vintage that Eleanora Duse, in the Italian version of Dumas' play, used to repeat in a crucial scene the name *Armando* with all the inflections of voice that contrasting emotions can elicit—it was that breath-taking recital of the famous actress that is said to have prompted Verdi to regret not having heard it before he composed the finale of one act of *La Traviata*.

Page 311: The symbol, as opposed to other imagery, is defined by Seidler, if I understand his obscure wording correctly, by *Hintergründigkeit*, by the presence, behind the meaning in the foreground, of a deeper meaning. Seidler, not being well read in non-Germanic critical literature, does not consider here the very enlightening remark by Baruzi, treating the mystic symbol in St. John of the Cross, that the symbolic value of a material object must *grow* before our eyes in the literary work; thus *Hintergründigkeit* is not enough for the presence of a symbol; it must impose itself *gradually* on us with increasing impact. This can be verified with the symbol of symbols, the Cross of Christ, as well as with the "wild duck" of Ibsen or the "sea gull" of Chekhov.

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